

Message Text

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 331 - JUNE 6, 1977

1. ISRAEL. THE LIKUD APPEARS CLOSE TO BEING ABLE TO OFFICIALLY FORM A NARROW RIGHT-WING COALITION. FOLLOWING A LIKUD-AGUDAT ISRAEL MEETING YESTERDAY, A SPOKESMAN FOR THE LATTER SAID THAT THE LIKUD HAS ACCEPTED MOST OF THE DEMANDS OF HIS PARTY. HE ADDED THAT THE DECISION AS TO WHETHER TO JOIN A LIKUD-LED COALITION WAS NOW UP TO THE ULTRA-ORTHODOS AGUDAT'S "COUNCIL OF SAGES," WHICH WILL DISCUSS THE MATTER AND ANNOUNCE A DECISION L7TER THIS WEEK. WITH AGUDAT (4 SEATS) AND THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY (12), THE LIKUD (45) WOULD HAVE A SLIM 61-SEAT KNESSET MAJORITY.

2. IN ORDER TO GAIN AGUDAT'S CONCURRENCE, THE LIKUD REPORTEDLY ACCEDED TO SEVERAL OF AGUDAT'S WISHES ON RELIGIOUS MATTERS. A COMPROMISE ON THE KEY ISSUE OF THE
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CONSCRIPTION OF WOMEN FOR MILITARY SERVICE APPARENTLY PAVED THE WAY FOR AGUDAT TO JOIN A LIKUD COALITION: THE LIKUD AGREED TO RELEASE RELIGIOUS WOMEN FROM MILITARY SERVICE WITHOUT "HARASSING" THEM WITH BUREAUCRATIC RED TAPE (RELIGIOUS WOMEN COULD, IN THE PAST, OBTAIN AN EXEMPTION ONLY AFTER GOING THROUGH A BUREAUCRATIC MAZE.)

3. THE PROSPECT THAT THE LIKUD MAY HAVE A NARROW KNESSET MAJORITY BY THE END OF THE WEEK IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON LIKUD-DMC COALITION NEGOTIATIONS. BEGIN PREFERS TO HAVE THE DMC ON BOARD TO ASSURE A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY AND LESSEN LIKUD'S HARDLINE IMAGE. AS FOR THE DMC, EMBASSY TEL AVIV BELIEVES THAT THE ODDS REMAIN BETTER THAN EVEN THAT IT WILL OPT TO JOIN. THE PRESSURE FROM THE DMC'S RANK AND FILE, WHO BELIEVE THE DMC WOULD BE ABLE TO MORE EFFECTIVELY PURSUE ITS GOALS AND MODERATE GOVERNMENT POLICY FROM WITHIN, IS RUNNING HEAVILY IN FAVOR OF JOINING.

4. THE LIKUD-DMC BARGAINING PROCESS WILL LIKELY BE PROTRACTED, HOWEVER. ACCORDING TO OUR EMBASSY, DMC LEADERS BELIEVE THE WELCOME MAT WILL STILL BE OUT EVEN IF A NARROW LIKUD COALITION IS INVESTED, AND THEY WILL STILL HOLD TO THEIR STRATEGY OF DRAGGING OUT NEGOTIATIONS UNTIL AFTER THE JUNE 21 HISTADRUT ELECTIONS. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT FOREIGN POLICY IS THE REAL BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES AND NOTED THAT LITTLE PROGRESS WAS MADE AT THEIR LAST BARGAINING SESSION. THE DMC IS MOST INTERESTED IN FINDING A COMPROMISE FORMULA BETWEEN THE PARTIES' DIFFERING VIEWS ON WEST BANK RETROCESSIONS AND SETTLEMENT POLICY IN THE OCCUPIED AREAS.

5. WHAT ULTIMATELY EMERGES FROM THIS COALITION BARGAINING SHOULD PROVIDE SOME INDICATION AS TO HOW STRONGLY BEGIN WILL PURSUE LIKUD'S HARDLINE POLICY IF HE BECOMES PRIME MINISTER. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE HIS STANCE ON THE WEST
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BANK AND OTHER ISSUES MAY BE SOFTENED AS A RESULT OF COALITION NEGOTIATIONS, OR THE PRESSURE FROM THE FULL WEIGHT OF HIS PRIME MINISTERIAL DUTIES AND INTERNATIONAL OPINION. OTHERS ARGUE, HOWEVER, THAT BEGIN'S HALLMARK IN THE PAST HAS BEEN THE CONSISTENCY OF HIS POSITIONS; HIS INITIAL HARDLINE STATEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES WOULD SEEM TO SUPPORT THIS LATTER VIEW.

6. IN THIS VEIN, EZER WEIZMAN--LIKUD'S DEFENSE MINISTER- DESIGNATE AND THE MAN CONSIDERED MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED BEGIN SHOULD THE LATTER HAVE FURTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS--MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS IN AN INTERVIEW OVER THE WEEKEND WITH WEST GERMANY'S STERN MAGAZINE:

--THERE WILL BE "NO WITHDRAWAL" FROM THE WEST BANK, WHICH SHOULD BECOME PART OF ISRAEL;

--ISRAEL WOULD ESTABLISH MORE SETTLEMENTS IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA, PROVIDED THE LAND FOR THEM WAS NOT TAKEN

FROM ARAB RESIDENTS;

--BEGIN COULD NEVER ACCEPT PRESIDENT CARTER'S CALL
FOR A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND;

--A LIKUD GOVERNMENT WOULD, HOWEVER, BE PREPARED
TO MAKE TERRITORIAL CONCESSION IN THE SINAI
AND GOLAN.

WEIZMAN ALSO SAID HE COULD "WELL IMAGINE" THAT ISRAEL MIGHT
BE FORCED TO LAUNCH A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE SHOULD ANOTHER
WAR THREATEN THE MIDDLE EAST, BUT HOPED THAT "IT WILL NOT
REACH THIS POINT." (CONFIDENTIAL)

7. EMBASSY CAIRO IS CONCERNED ABOUT A GROWING FEELING IN
EGYPT THAT THE US TAKES SADAT FOR GRANTED AND REGARDS
SYRIA'S ASAD AS THE KEY ARAB FIGURE IN CURRENT MIDDLE
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EAST DIPLOMACY. GIVEN THE PERSONAL RIVALRY BETWEEN THE
TWO LEADERS, SADAT'S ABILITY TO INFLUENCE EGYPTIAN AND
ARAB OPINION TOWARD DIFFICULT CONCESSIONS COULD BE
SERIOUSLY DAMAGED UNLESS THE US QUASHES THESE RUMORS BY
PUBLICLY REAFFIRMING THE IMPORTANCE OF SADAT'S ROLE. THE
EMBASSY POINTS OUT THAT WHATEVER THE SOURCE OF THE RUMORS--
WHICH HAVE BEEN VARIOUSLY TRACED TO FORMER NASSER AIDE
HAYKAL, THE ISRAELIS, OR ENDEMIC MIDDLE EASTERN RUMOR-
MONGERING -- IN EGYPTIAN EYES A SERIOUS CONTEST IS DEVELOP-
ING OVER PRESIDENT CARTER'S PUBLIC AFFIRMATION OF THE
RESPECTIVE ROLES OF ASAD AND SADAT.

8. EGYPTIAN DIPLOMATS IN MOSCOW BELIEVE THE SOVIETS ARE
SERIOUS ABOUT IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH EGYPT AND WILL
MAKE CONCESSIONS AT GROMYKO'S MEETING WITH FAHMY IN
MOSCOW JUNE 9-10. THE EGYPTIAN POLITICAL COUNSELOR TOLD
OUR EMBASSY THE SOVIETS HAD BEEN "EXTREMELY INSISTENT"
THAT THE MEETING BE HELD IN MOSCOW BECAUSE THEY ENVISION
CONCILIATORY GESTURES ON MILITARY SPARE PARTS AND DEBT
RESCHEDULING, AND WANT GROMYKO TO HAVE READY ACCESS TO THE
REST OF THE LEADERSHIP IF HARD DECISIONS HAVE TO BE MADE
AND BECAUSE GROMYKO WANTS TO STAY CLOSE TO HOME ON THE
EVE OF THE JUNE 16 SUPREME SOVIET SESSION AND IN THE WAKE
OF THE PODGORNYY OUSTER.

9. THE SOVIET DESK OFFICER FOR EGYPT HINTED THAT EGYPTIAN
OPTIMISM MAY BE WARRANTED. HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES
THAT WHILE AGREEMENT MAY BE POSSIBLE ON TENTATIVE FIRST
STEPS A LARGE RESIDUE OF DISTRUST REMAINS ON THE SOVIET
SIDE AND A MORE FAR-REACHING RAPPROCHEMENT WILL BE TOUGH
TO NEGOTIATE.

10. EGYPT AND LIBYA HAVE AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO HOLD HIGH-LEVEL TALKS IN CAIRO, PROBABLY NEXT SUNDAY, TO DISCUSS THEIR STRAINED RELATIONS, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS FROM CAIRO. EVEN IF DISCUSSIONS ARE HELD, THE TWO
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COUNTRIES ARE UNLIKELY TO MAKE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS TOWARD RESOLVING THEIR DEEP-SEATED DIFFERENCES.

11. A LIBYAN EMISSARY, AFTER MEETING WITH EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SADAT ON SATURDAY, ANNOUNCED THE AGREEMENT TO THE EGYPTIAN PRESS. HE SAID EGYPTIAN PRIME MINISTER SALIM WOULD MEET WITH HIS LIBYAN COUNTERPART, ABD AL-UBAYDI, IN CAIRO. LIBYA REPORTEDLY SUSPENDED ITS PROPAGANDA ATTACKS AGAINST EGYPT ON SATURDAY.

12. SADAT PROBABLY CONSENTED TO THE MEETING PRIMARILY TO MOLLIFY OTHER ARAB STATES, SUCH AS SAUDI ARABIA, WHICH WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE DISPUTE SETTLED. HE HAS NO ILLUSIONS, HOWEVER, THAT SUCH AN EFFORT WITH LIBYAN PRESIDENT QADHAF-- WHOM HE CONTINUES TO REGARD AS DANGEROUS AND UNPREDICTABLE. SADAT WOULD NOT TRUST THE LIBYAN LEADER TO LIVE UP TO AN AGREEMENT, EVEN IF ONE WERE REACHED. THE USSR WILL WELCOME EVEN THIS MODEST DEVELOPMENT, AS A LESSENING OF TENSIONS BETWEEN EGYPT AND LIBYA IS IN MOSCOW'S INTEREST.
(CONFIDENTIAL)

13. LEABANON SYRIAN LEADS HAVE PROPOSED TO FORMER PRESIDENT SHANMAUN THAT CLOSER TIES BE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN LEBANON AND SYRIA. THE SYRIANS, ACCORDING TO A BROADCAST, SUGGESTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GREATER COOPERATION IN SEVERAL AREAS, INCLUDING SECURITY. LEBANON WILL NEED SUCH GUARANTEES SHOULD THE ARAB SECURITY FORCE MANDATE NOT BE RENEWED, THE SYRIANS ARE SAID TO HAVE ARGUED.

14. ACCORDING TO LEBANESE ARMY COMMANDER KHOURY, SOME PROGRESS IS BEING MADE AT REINTEGRATING MUSLIM OFFICERS INTO THE LEBANESE ARMY. ALTHOUGH SOME INCIDENTS HAVE OCCURRED, FIRM ACTIONS BY KHOURY HAVE ALLEVIATED MOST PROBLEMS. KHOURY BELIEVES THAT AT LEAST SIX MONTHS WILL PASS BEFORE HE HAS A FUNCTIONING BI-CONFESSIONAL ARMY.
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